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LOWELL CITY HALL
407 MERRIMACK STREET
LOWELL
MIDDLESEX COUNTY
MASSACHUSETTS

HABS No. MA-1152

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON D.C., 20240

Name: Lowell City Hall

Location: 407 Merrimack Street
Lowell
Middlesex County
Massachusetts

Present Use: City Hall

Significance: The Lowell City Hall replaced Old City Hall (226 Merrimack Street) as the home of the city government, and in so doing, it symbolized Lowell's evolution from a mill town to a modern city. In contrast to the small and inauspicious first municipal building (1830; see Section III E) the architecture of which reveals the town government's subordination to the mill interests in Lowell that tended to view the town government as merely an extension of their corporate structure--the size and elaborate architecture of the Lowell City Hall (1893) clearly indicate that Lowell had emerged as a diverse and mature industrial city by the end of the nineteenth century and that Lowell's government had broken free of mill control. The Lowell City Hall is one of the finest examples of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture in the Lowell region.

I. A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection:

In 1879, the Lowell City Council voted to purchase the land lying to the west of Monument Square (a small common dedicated to Lowell's Civil War dead and the site of the statue "Winged Victory") in order to build a new City Hall. The land was purchased from the Merrimack Company, Lowell's largest and oldest textile manufacturing company.

The City Council waited several years before it passed a joint resolution authorizing the appointment of a commission to erect a new city hall (April 27, 1888). In response to a petition that had been signed earlier, the City Council on May 20, 1888 soon expanded the commission's powers to include the construction of a combined City Library and Memorial Building on the City Hall lot in conjunction with the building of City Hall. The contracts for the two jobs, however, were always kept separate.

The Commission then sponsored a design competition, which received twenty-three replies. After much discussion, the firm of Merrill and Cutler of Lowell was awarded the contract for City Hall. F. W. Stickney, also of Lowell, received the contract for Memorial Hall (the city library).

Following a series of bids by construction contractors, the cornerstones of both City Hall and Memorial Hall were laid to the accompaniment of a good deal of ceremony in the fall of 1890.

Both the City Hall and Memorial Hall (see Section III E) were completed within three years, and they were dedicated on October 14, 1893. Construction costs for the City Hall, originally estimated at \$200,000, eventually ran to about \$350,000.

2. Architect:

The firm of Merrill and Cutler of Lowell designed Lowell's City Hall. The principals in the company were Otis A. Merrill and Arthur S. Cutler. The firm also designed Lowell's First Congregational Church, the Lowell Armory, Central Block, and Odd Fellows' Building; the Concord New Hampshire, High School Building; the New Bedford YMCA Building; and the Wilton, New Hampshire, Town Hall.

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

There was no single contractor for the City Hall in Lowell. Instead, a number of different contractors were employed. Granite and stone work were initially provided by the Cape Ann Granite Company, of Gloucester, Massachusetts, but the company was able to complete only about two-thirds of its contract; the work was finished by Maine and New Hampshire Granite Company of Portland, Maine, the same company that did the stone work on Memorial Hall. The Builders Iron Foundry of Providence, Rhode Island, completed the iron work from start to finish. William H. Wiggin and Company of Lowell undertook the carpentry work. The brick mason for the job was C. F. Foss and Company, also of Lowell. Plumbing and heating work was done by Farrell and Conanton, the H. R. Barker Manufacturing Company (both companies from Lowell) and the Boston Blower Company. The Graves Elevator Company of Rochester, New York, installed the building's elevator. A full list of contractors is included in Section III E.

4. Original plans and construction:
The best description of Lowell's City Hall in 1893 are provided by Prentiss Webster, editor, the Story of the City Hall Commission, (Lowell, MA: Citizen Newspaper Co., Printers), 1894. This volume also includes copies of the building's original plans. The plans themselves are located in the Buildings Department, City Hall, Merrimack Street, Lowell, Massachusetts. A number of very good early views of the building are located at the University of Lowell, Special Collections, and at the Samuel S. Pollard Memorial Library in Lowell. Newspaper descriptions are available at the Pollard Library.
5. Alterations and additions:
There have been no major additions or alterations to Lowell's City Hall itself. As part of the urban renewal programs of the early 1970s, however, the historic landscape around City Hall was severely disrupted. Most notably, the John F. Kennedy Civic Center (ca.1973) was built directly north of City Hall in order to provide more room for city offices.

B. Historical Context:

The new City Hall was built in order to provide adequate space and a more architecturally appropriate home for city offices. The original city office building (today known as Old City Hall, owned by the National Park Service) was far too small to meet city needs, and it had grown old and incurred heavy maintenance costs on a continuing basis. Old City Hall's history is best documented by National Park Service Historic Structures Reports written by Penelope Batcheler and Harlan Unrau.

Lowell's City Hall has housed the city government since its construction in 1893. Consequently, the building's use has varied little over the years--but its occupants have included a diversity of politicians. Lowell's political history is best documented by Mary Blewett, "The Mills and the Multitudes: A Political History," in Arthur L. Eno, Jr., ed., Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts (New Hampshire Publishing Company in collaboration with the Lowell Historical Society), 1976.

II. A. Description of Exterior:

The following description of the Lowell City Hall is taken from the Lowell National Historical Park and Preservation District Cultural Resources Inventory that was prepared for

the National Park Service by the Boston architectural firm of Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott in 1980:

The new City Hall is constructed of white Conway granite. It is four stories tall and U-shaped in plan. In the center of the Worthen Street facade is a projecting central-entrance tower which rises to a height of 180 feet. The tower is flanked by wings which terminate in corner pavilions. The multiplicity of steep hip roofs atop this structure may be classified as chateausque. All of its facades are formally finished. Stylistically, this structure features Richardsonian Romanesque surface treatments. Round arches, rock-faced granite surfaces and foliated capitals appear on its facades. The principal entrances to the building face Merrimack and Worthen Streets.

The Merrimack Street entrance is dramatically emphasized by flanking bow fronts which rise four stories, culminating in conical roofs. The bow fronts project from a wider facade gable. Access to the recessed round-arched Merrimack Street entrance is gained by a flight of stairs. To the left of the Merrimack Street entrance are two window bays. The top floor windows have wide Romanesque arches with clearly articulated voussoirs of rock-faced granite. To the right of the Merrimack entrance are three pairs of windows.

Projecting from its Merrimack and Worthen Street corner is a square four-story pavilion. The basement, second, and third floor windows are square-arched and have finely dressed granite sills and lintels. The windows of the top floor are surmounted by round arches. The cornices of the corner pavilions have granite consoles. The steep hip roof features round-arched dormer windows flanked by tourelles. The dormers have copper roofs. The pavilion projecting from the northeastern corner on Worthen Street is similarly covered. Between the corner pavilions and the central entrance bay are wings which are three double-window bays wide.

The wings' fourth floor windows have round arches. In the center of each wings' roof is a dormer window encased in granite and topped by a copper

roof.

In the center of the Worthen Street facade is an important Lowell focal point--the City Hall's 180 foot high clock tower which majestically presides over Monument Square and vicinity. Despite the heavy granite building materials utilized in the tower's construction, a graceful light-weight effect has been achieved. The tower's great height and narrowness relative to the massive main body of the City Hall negates any sense of heaviness. The edges of the tower are defined by cylindrical tourelles which project above the uppermost cornice. Small and narrow deeply-recessed windows appear in the portion of the tower beneath the recessed clock panels. Machicolation appears above and below the portion of the tower which contains the clock faces. At the top of the tower is a round-arched arcade topped by more machicolation and a steeply pitched roof. At the apex of the tower's roof is a copper weather-vane.

B. Description of the Interior

According to the Cultural Resources Inventory:

The interior of the City Hall is renowned for the richness of its stained glass, foliated medieval capitals, cast iron stair railings and golden oak woodwork. On one wall of the courtyard is a rounded oriel supported by a boldly shaped granite base.

C. Site

Lowell's City Hall is bounded by the John F. Kennedy Civic Center to the north, Worthen Street to the east, Merrimack Street to the south, and the Samuel S. Pollard Memorial Library (Memorial Hall) to the west. The building's main entrance fronts on Worthen Street.

The Lowell City Hall has been the focal point of its street-scape since its construction. It is surrounded by historic buildings to the south and east, including the First Congregational Church, the Bank Block, and Monument Square, and by 1960s and 1970s urban renewal districts to the north and west.

The building's landscaping is described by the Cultural Resources Inventory:

The new City Hall is landscaped with lawns and wide walkways. It is adjacent to the broad brick plaza

and fountain of the J. F. K. Civic Center, which provides a dramatic backdrop to Monument Square and is the northern focal point for Cardinal O'Connell Parkway. Maiden Lane was widened and landscaped in 1917 to create a more pleasing southern approach to the new City Hall.

The firm of Olmstead, Olmstead, and Eliot was paid \$152.40 for plans to "lay out, grade, and curb the City Hall lot" in 1894, but the plans were not adopted. The plans had called for the relocation of the statue "Winged Victory" from Monument Square, and that proposal in particular met with severe local opposition.

III. A. Architectural Drawings

The original 1890 plans for the Lowell City Hall by Merrill and Cutler are located in the Buildings Department, City Hall, Merrimack Street, Lowell, Massachusetts.

B. Early views

Early views of the Lowell City Hall are numerous--too numerous, in fact, to include here in their entirety. The photographs that are included with this report show the building upon its completion in 1893 and City Hall and its surroundings, ca. 1900; also included are photographs taken from the 1889 design competition and some revisions. It is interesting to note that Merrill and Cutler's design had originally finished third in the competition, but after much discussion and forty-seven ballots, the City Hall Commission finally reached its decision. The rules of the competition had not bound the Commission to the first prize winner, F. W. Stickney, although Stickney did get the contract for Memorial Hall.

The best collections of photographs of City Hall are located at the University of Lowell, Special Collections, and at the Samuel S. Pollard Memorial Library, Merrimack Street, Lowell.

C. Bibliography

1. Primary Sources:

City of Lowell, "City Council Minutes," City Clerk's Office, City Hall, Merrimack Street, Lowell, MA

Lowell City Documents, Samuel S. Pollard Memorial Library, Merrimack Street, Lowell, MA

"New City Hall, Lowell, Massachusetts," volume containing instructions to the contractors who were to bid on City

Hall's construction; describes all specifications on all aspects of the building's construction; located in the Samuel S. Pollard Memorial Library, Lowell, MA, (no publisher, ca. 1890).

2. Secondary Sources

Blewett, Mary, H., "The Mills and the Multitudes: A Political History," in Arthur L. Eno, Jr., Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell Massachusetts (New Hampshire Publishing Company in collaboration with the Lowell Historical Society), 1976.

Coburn, Frederick W., History of Lowell and Its People (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company), 1920

Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott, Lowell National Historical Park and Preservation District Cultural Resources Inventory, Lowell National Historical Park Library, Lowell, MA

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Draft Historic Structures Report, Architectural Data, Old City Hall, Lowell National Historical Park, Massachusetts," by Penelope H. Batcheler, September, 1979.

_____, "Historic Structures Report, Historical Data Section, Old City Hall, Lowell National Historical Park, Lowell, Massachusetts," by Harlan D. Unrau, 1981.

Webster, Prentiss, ed., The Story of the City Hall Commission (Lowell, Mass.: Citizen Newspaper Co., Printers), 1894

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

The relevant sources regarding the Lowell City Hall have been investigated quite thoroughly--most recently by Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott. This is particularly true of documents located in the city of Lowell itself. It might be worthwhile to look into the records of Olmstead, Olmstead, and Eliot to examine the firm's landscape design proposals of 1894.

E. Supplemental Material

- * 1. Copies of the City Auditor's Reports, 1889-1894, regarding the City Hall construction, from Lowell City Documents

* 2. List of Contractors, City Hall, from Webster, The Story of the City Hall Commission

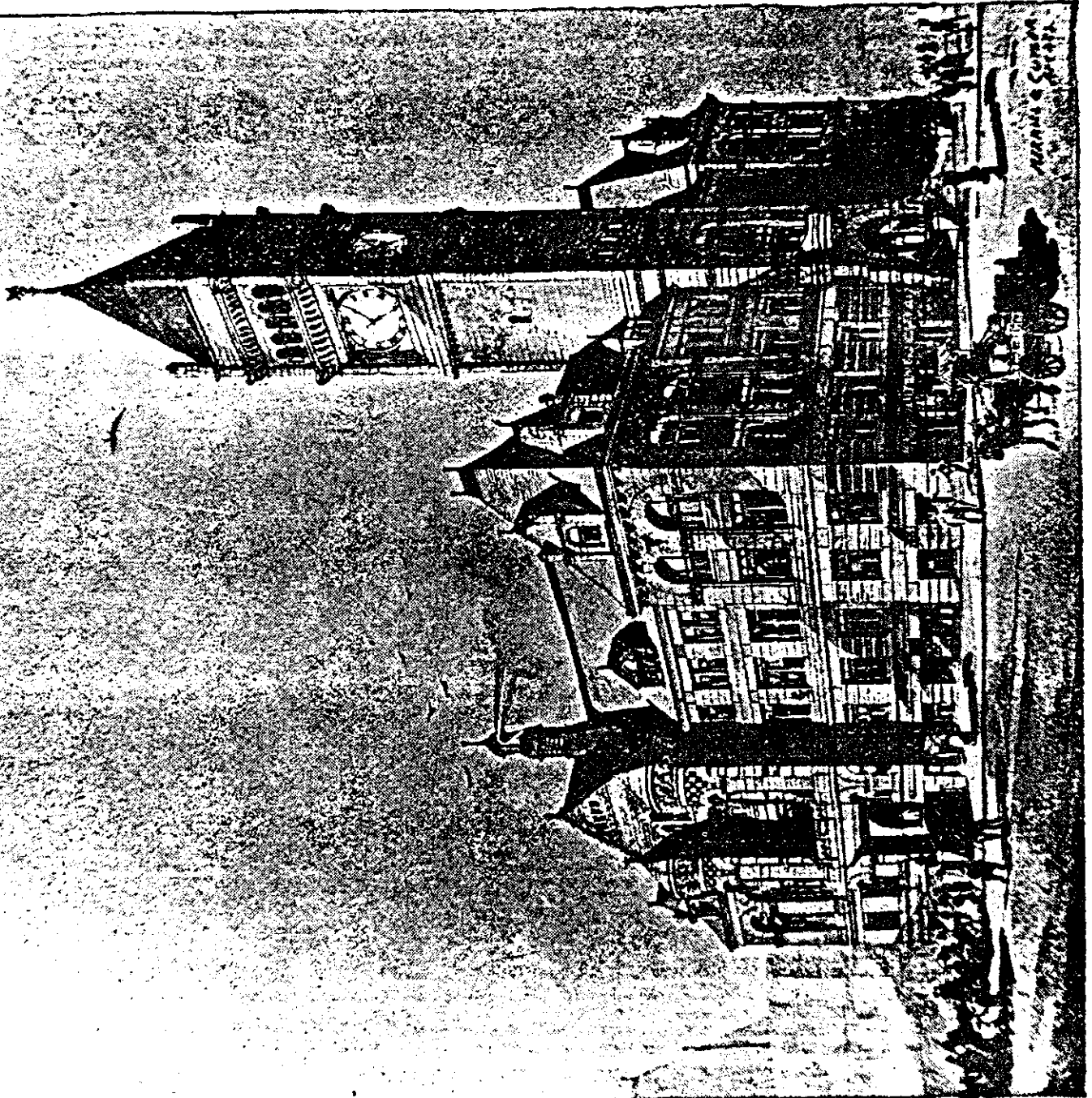
3. Photographs
 Memorial Hall
 J. F. K. Civic Center
 Old City Hall

Prepared by Robert Weible
Historian
Lowell National Historical Park
June, 1982

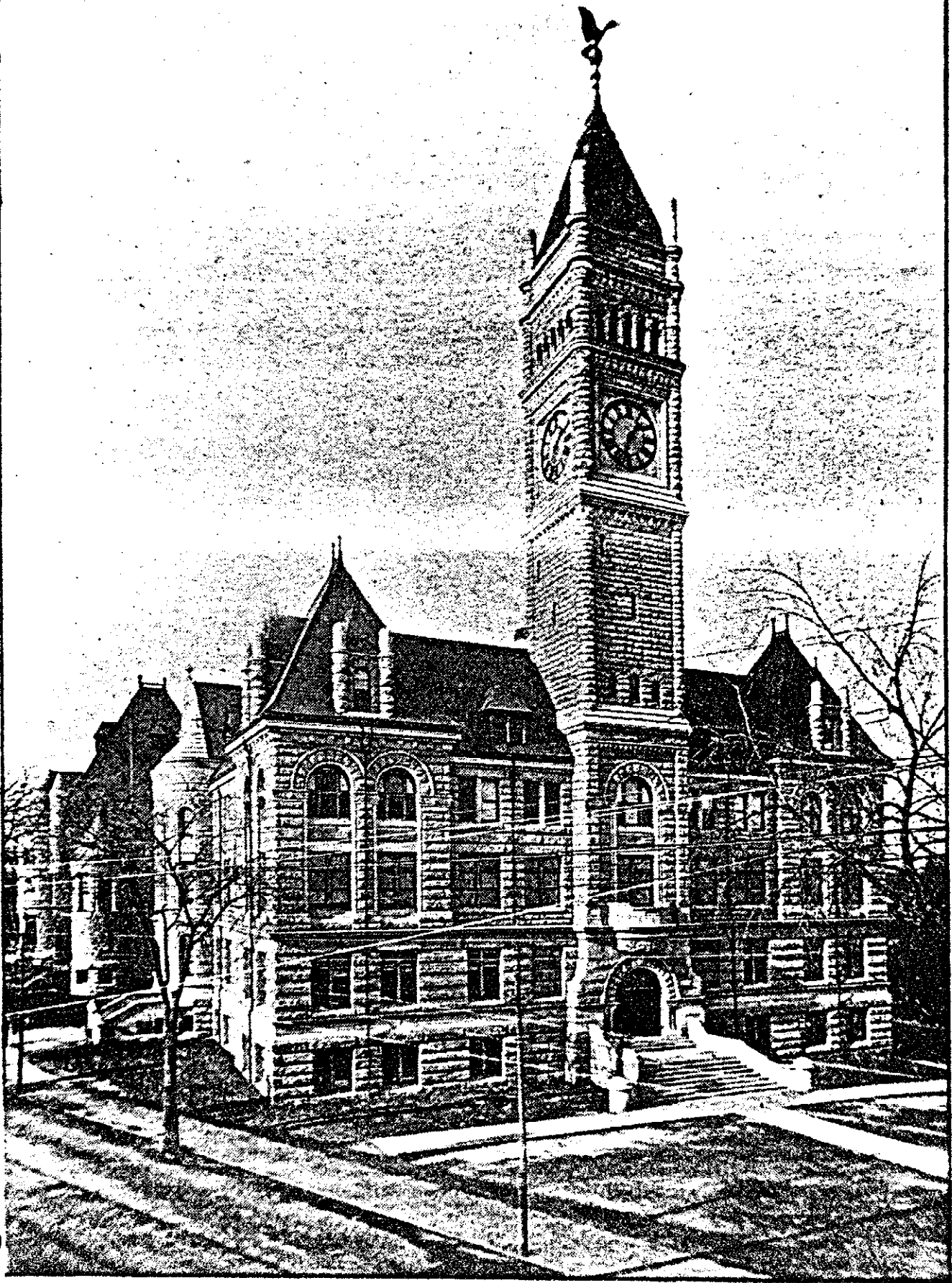
* SEE FIELD RECONOS

Section III. B

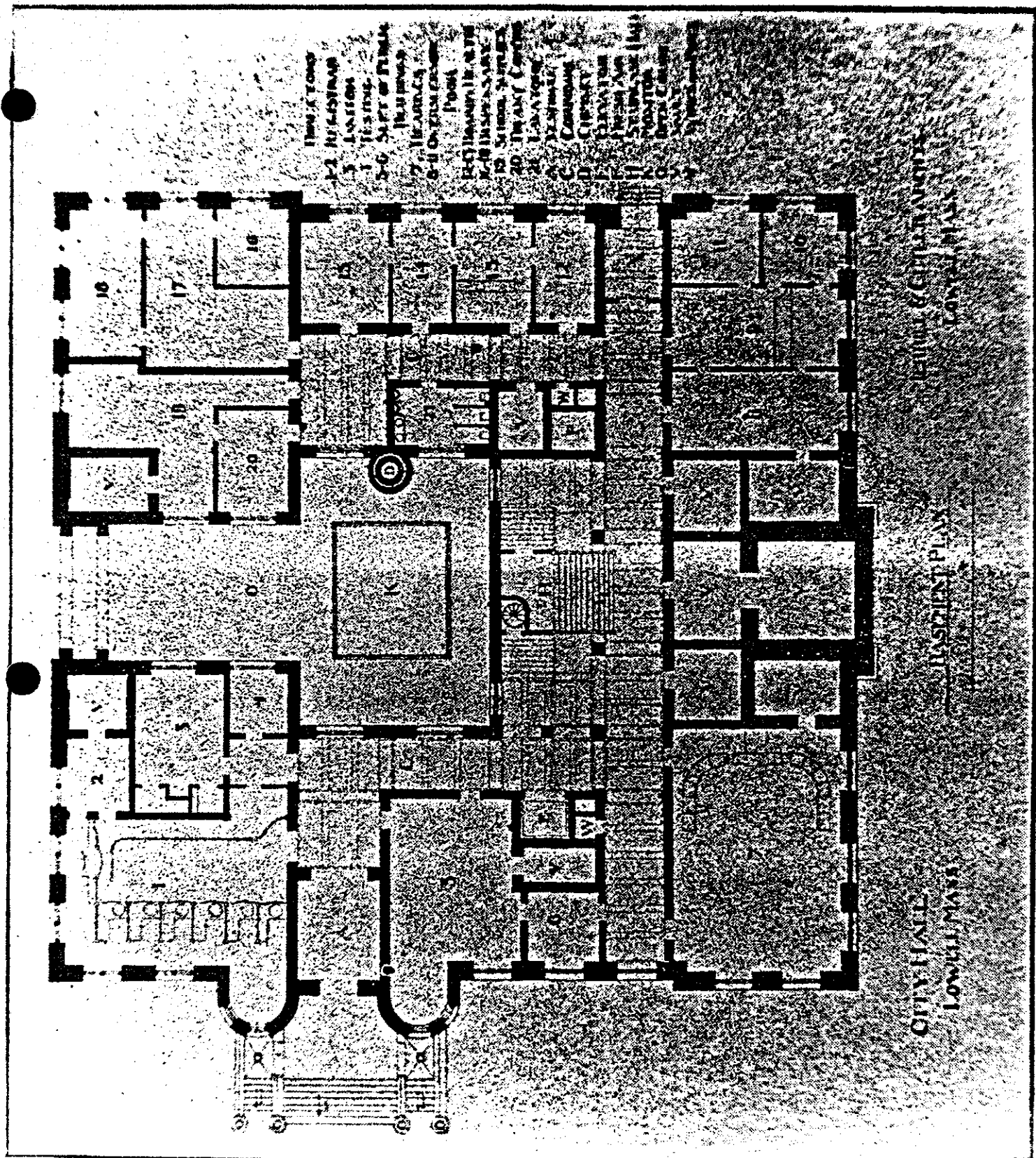
Early Views



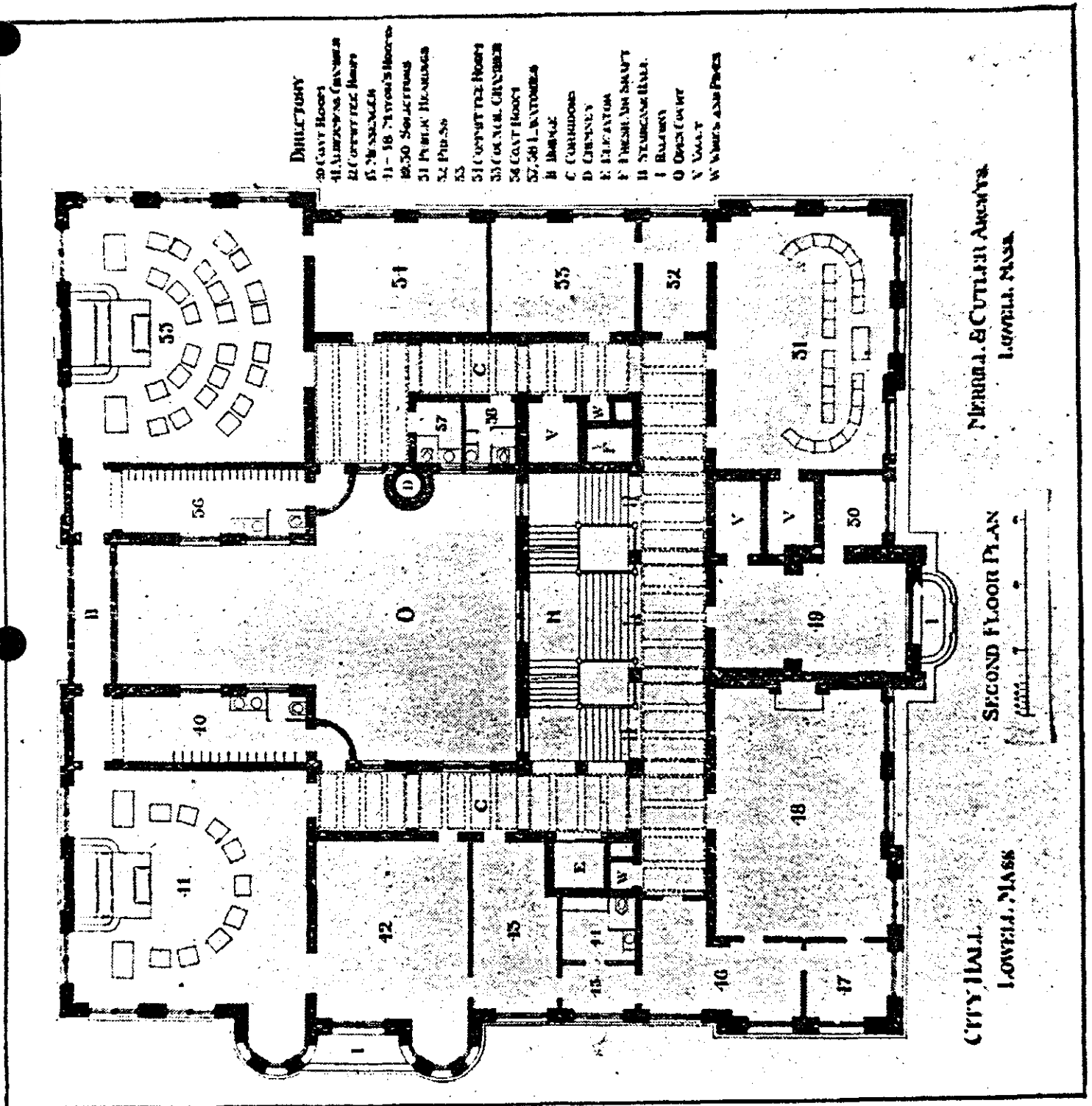
City Hall, architect's drawing, 1893 (Webster)



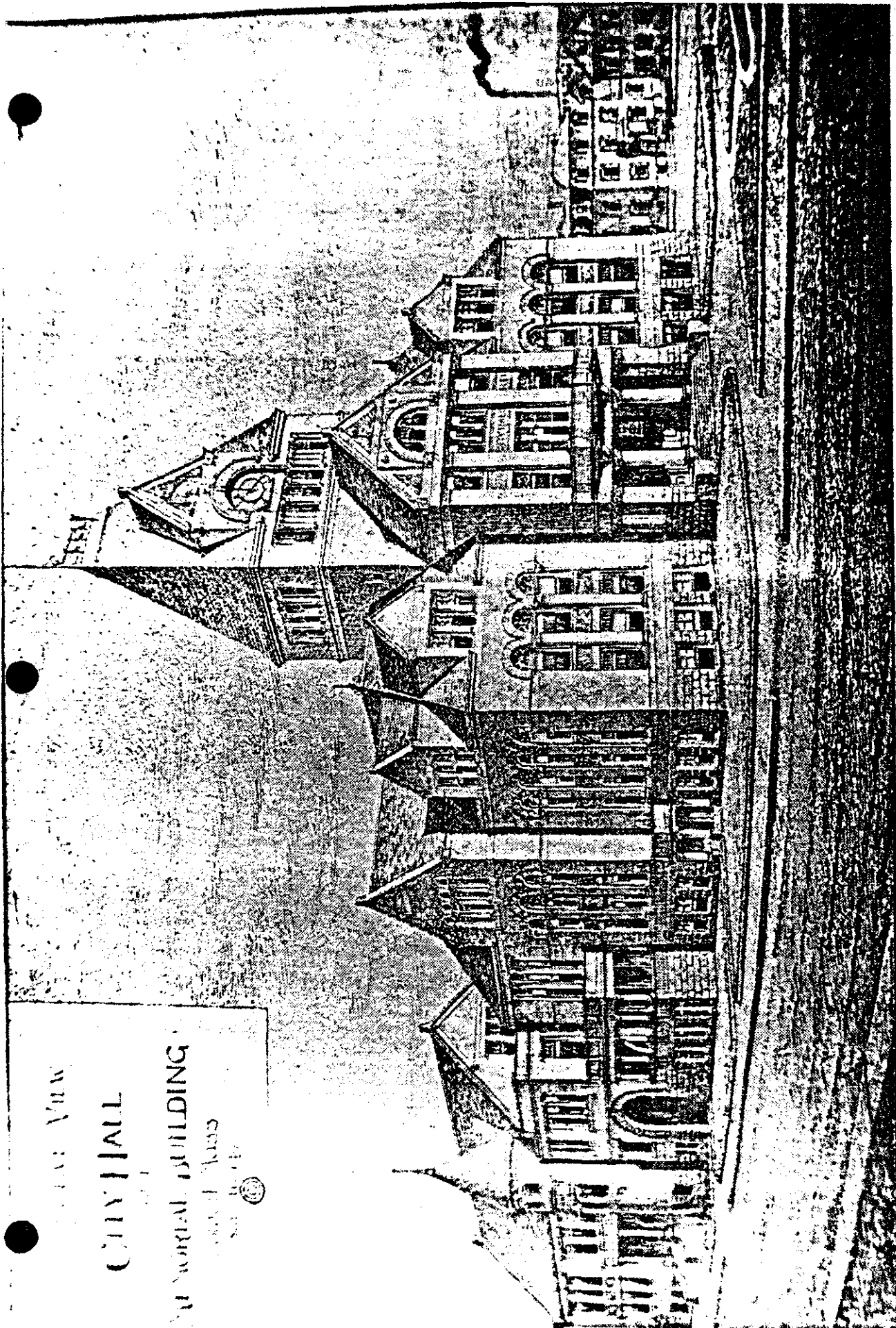
VIEW FROM THE



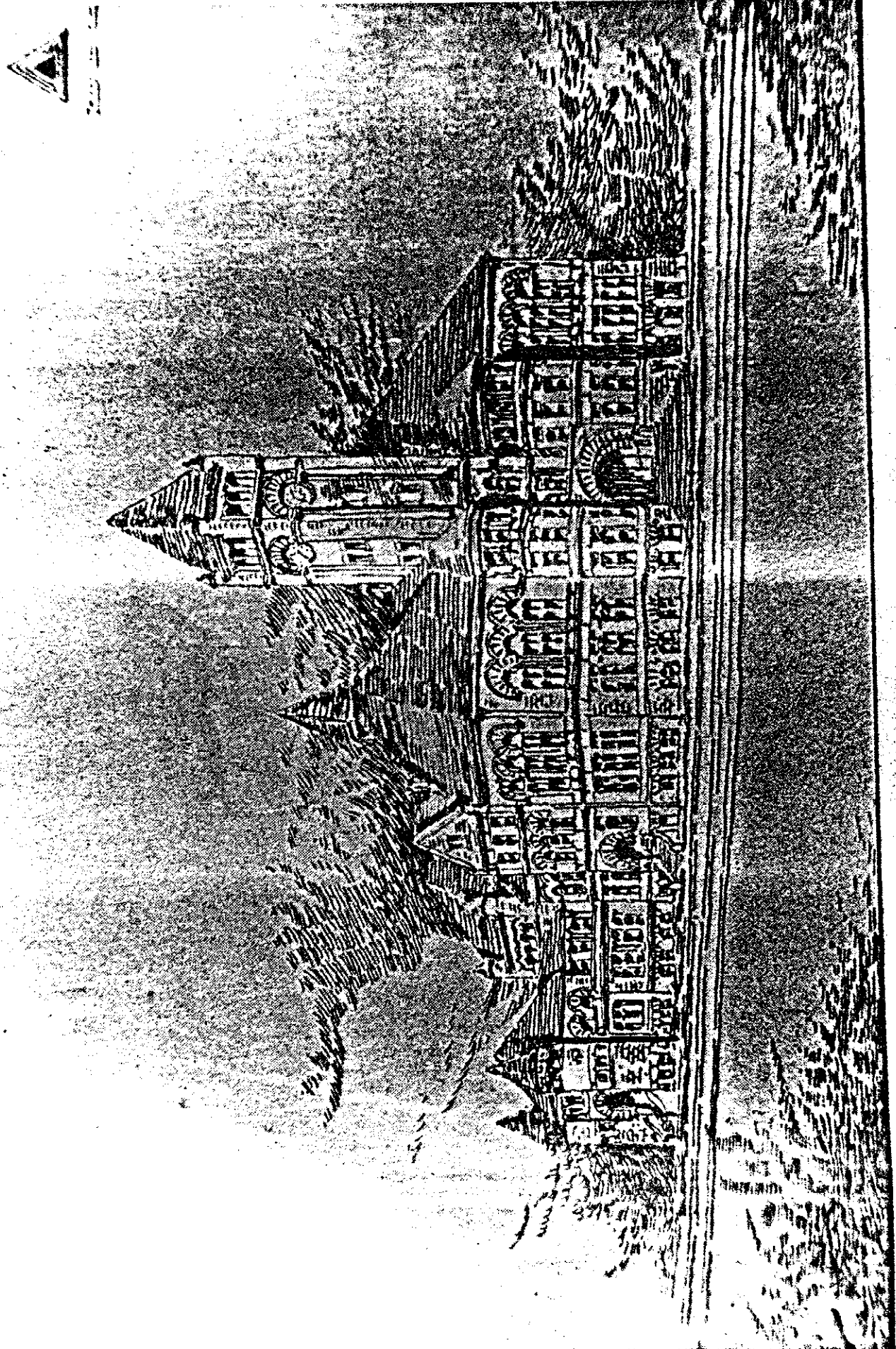
City Hall, basement plan (Webster)



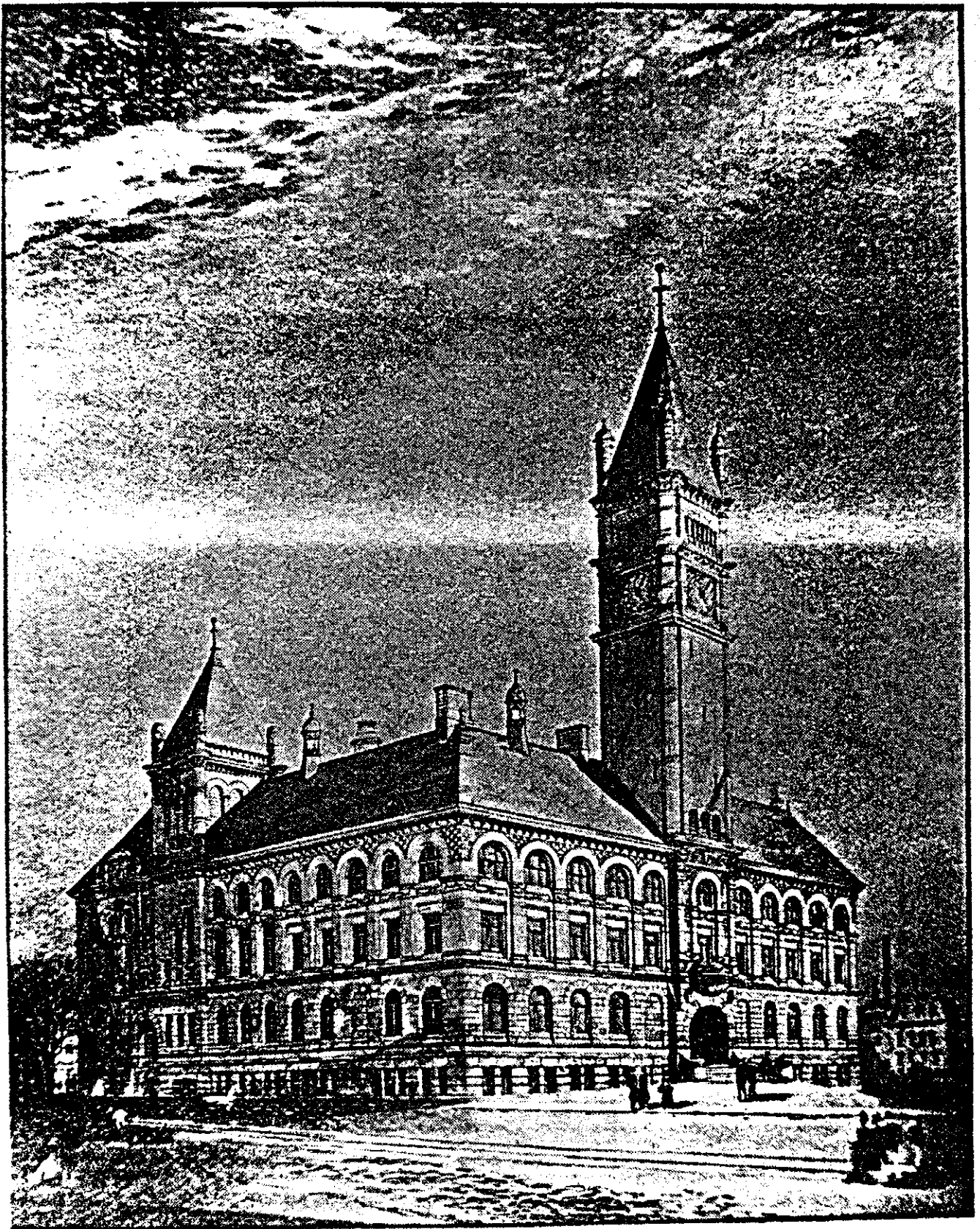
City Hall, second floor plan (Webster)



FIRST PRIZE PLAN.

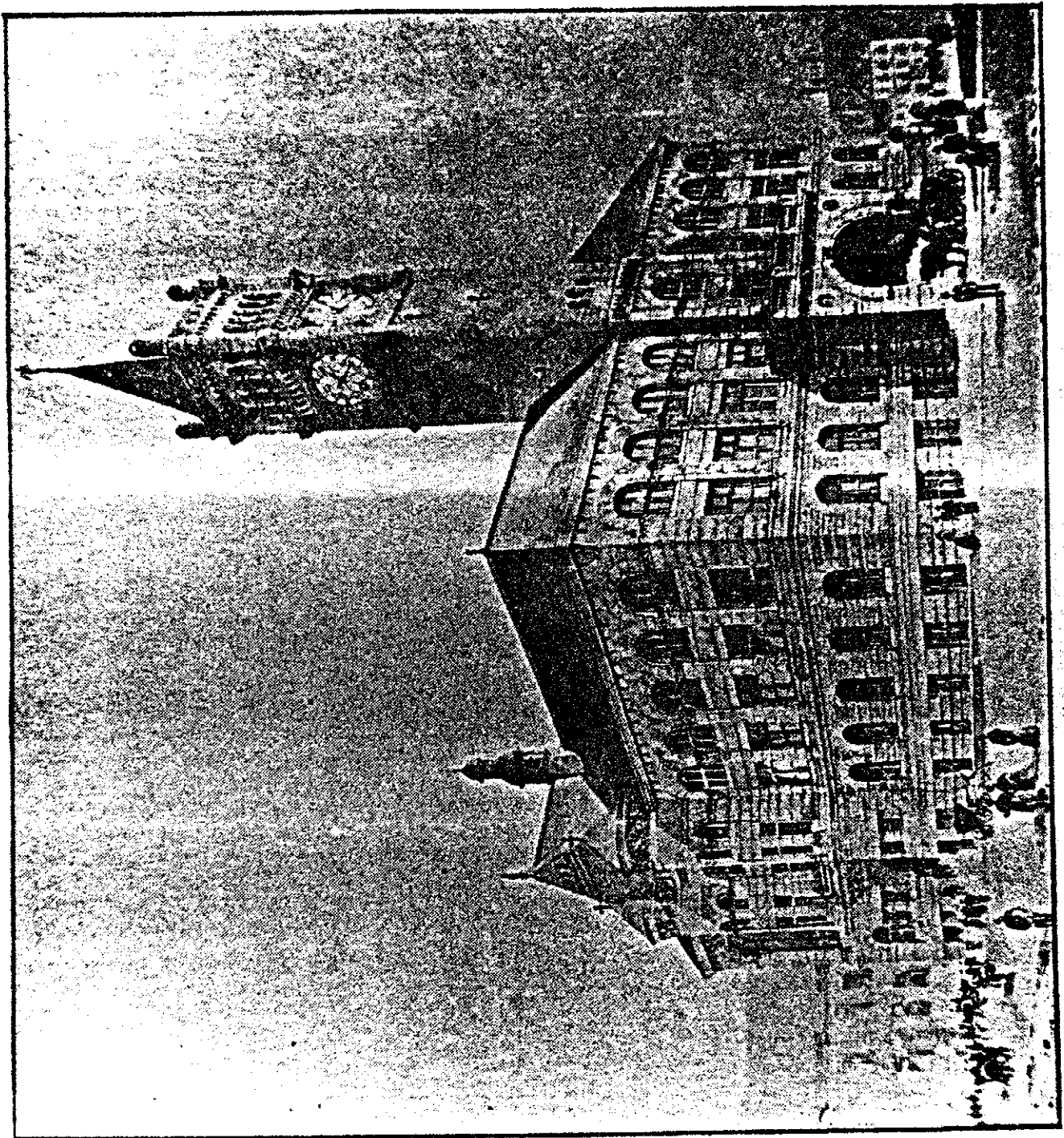


SECOND PRIZE PLAN.



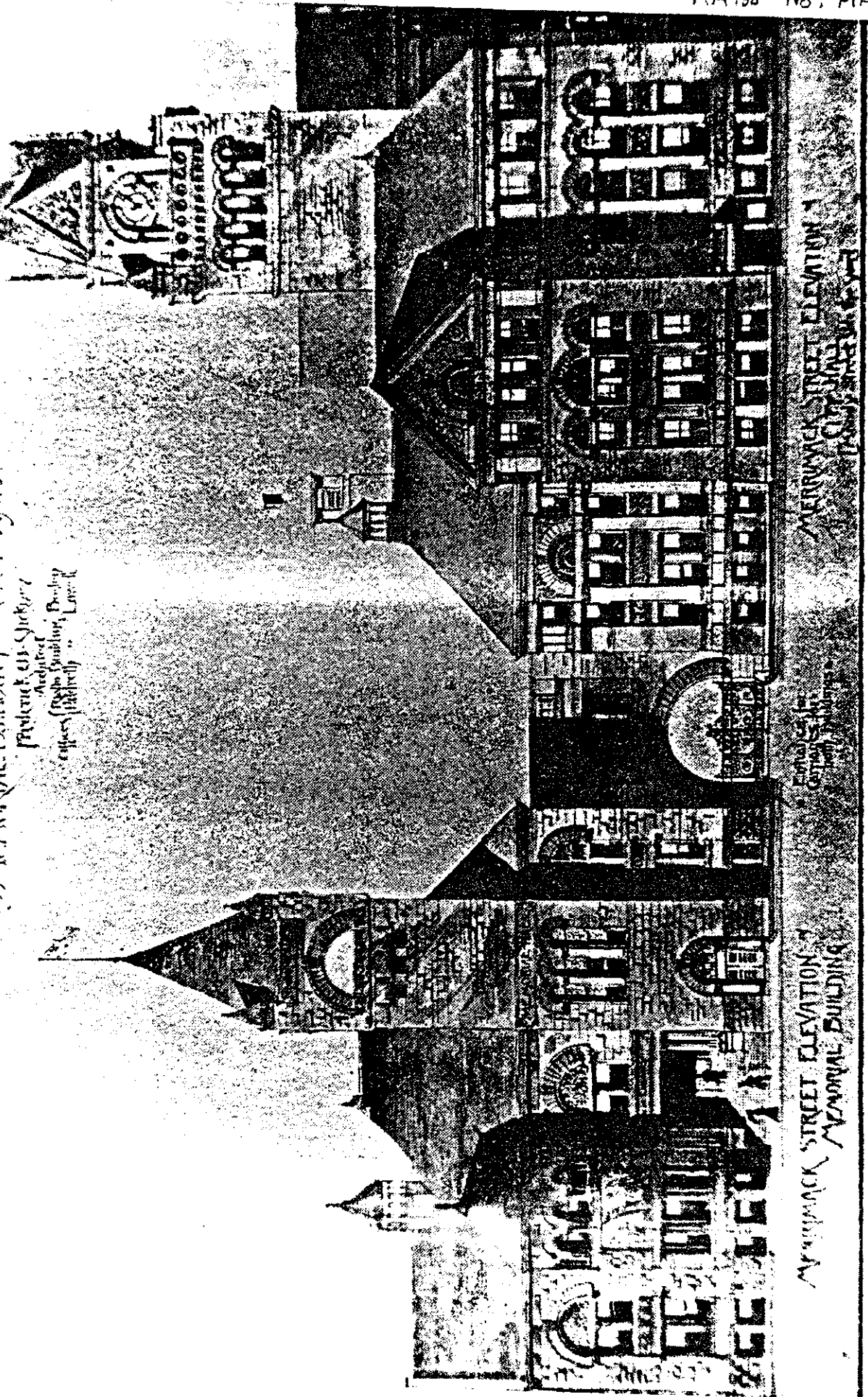
THIRD PRIZE PLAN.

Design competition, 3rd prize (Webster)

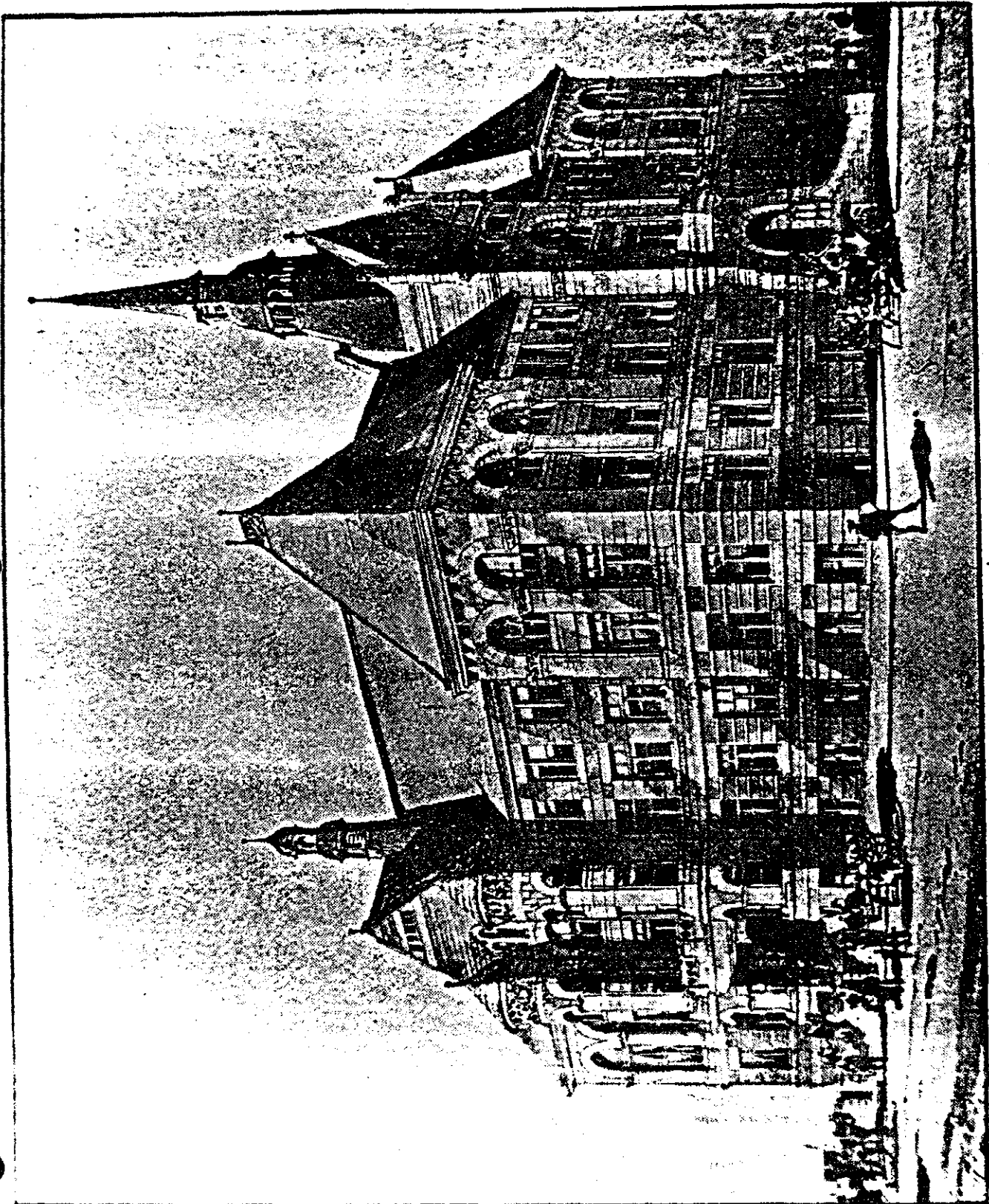


REVISED PLAN, MERRILL & CUTLER.

Designed for the
 DEPARTMENT OF
 MEMORIAL BUILDING and CITY HALL
 Frederick W. Stickney
 Architect
 (Boston Building, Boston
 Office, 111 North Street, Lowell)

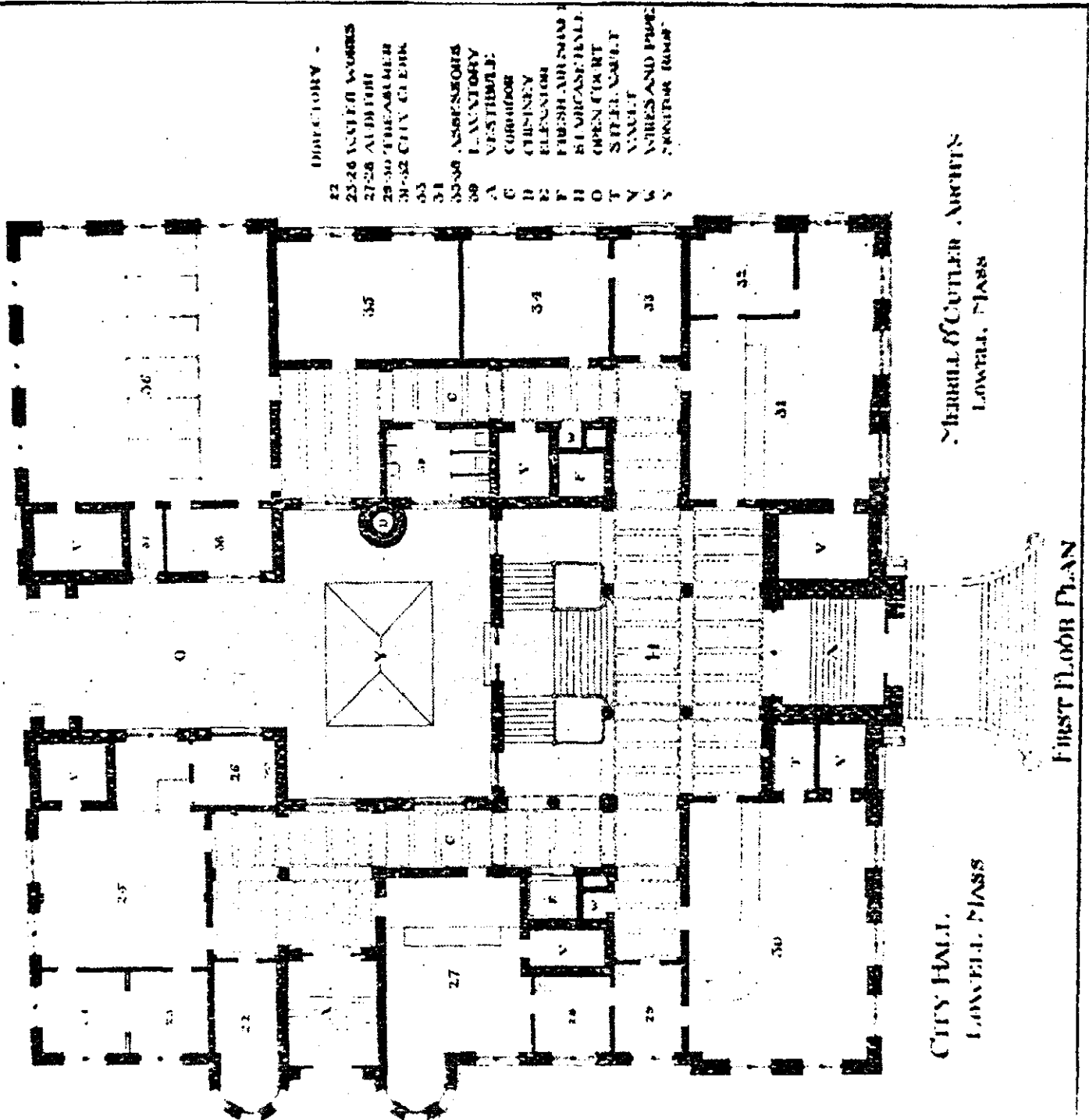


REVISED PLAN, F. W. STICKNEY.

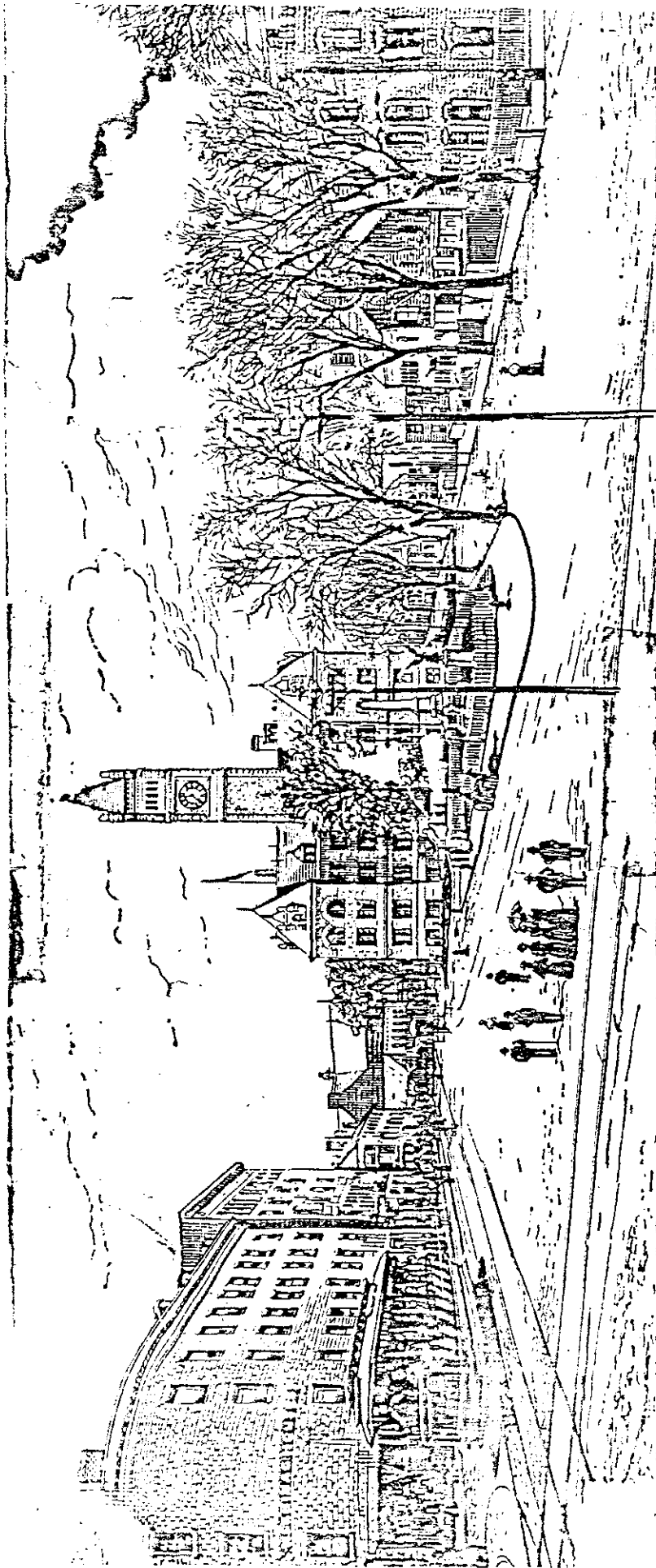


THE LOW TOWER PLAN.

City Hall, alternative design (Webster)



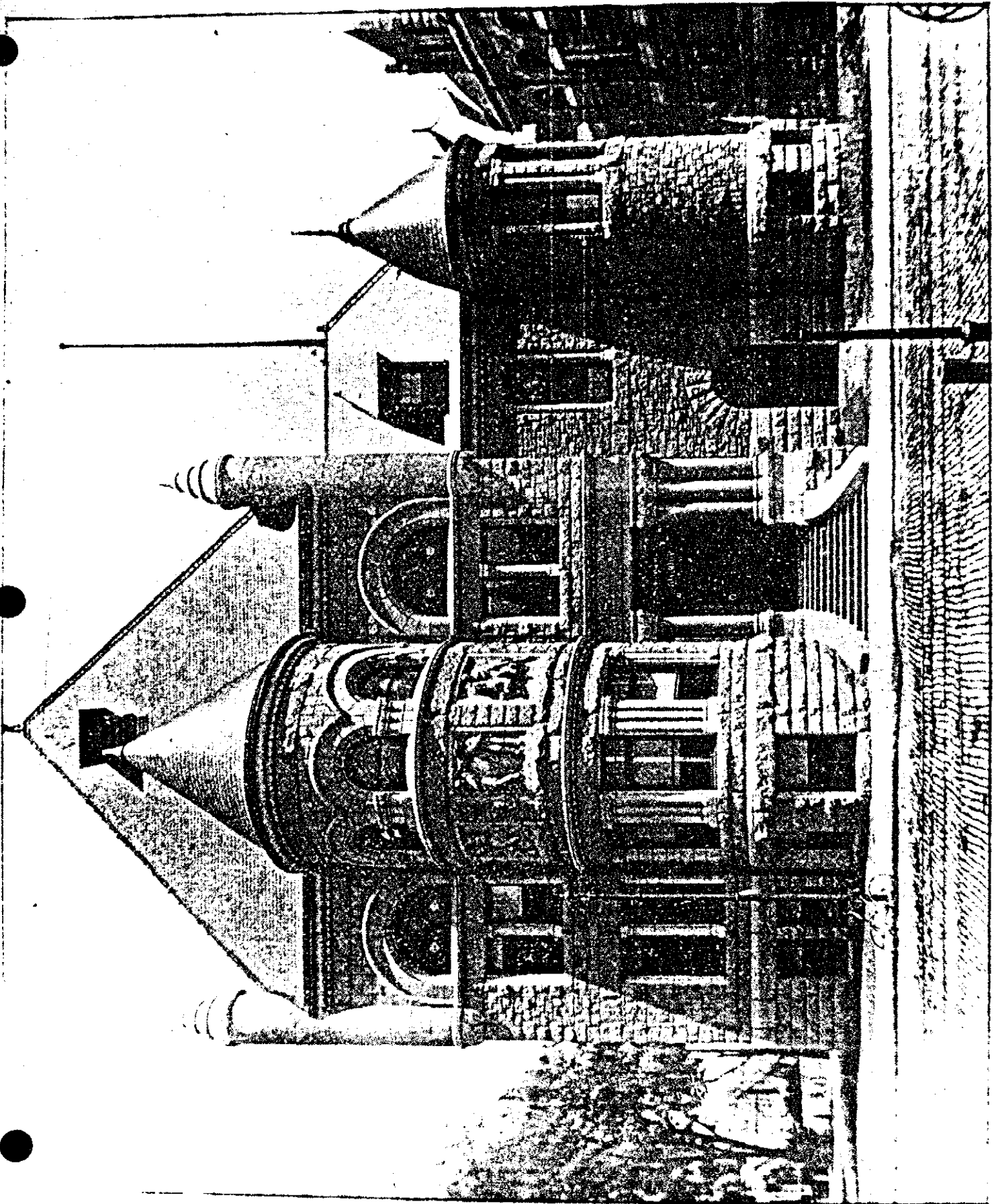
City Hall, first floor plan (Webster)



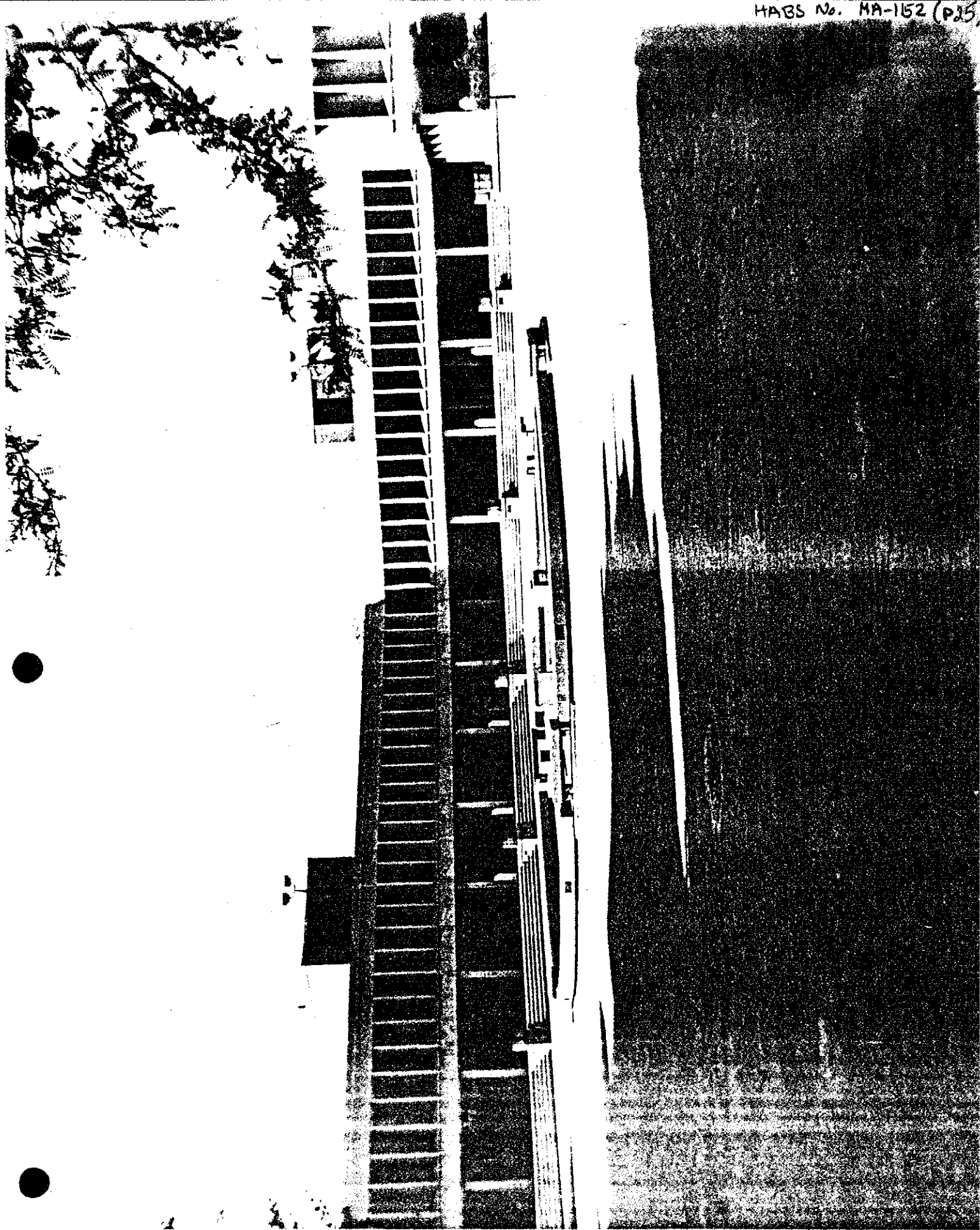
Monument Square, ca.1900 (University of Lowell)



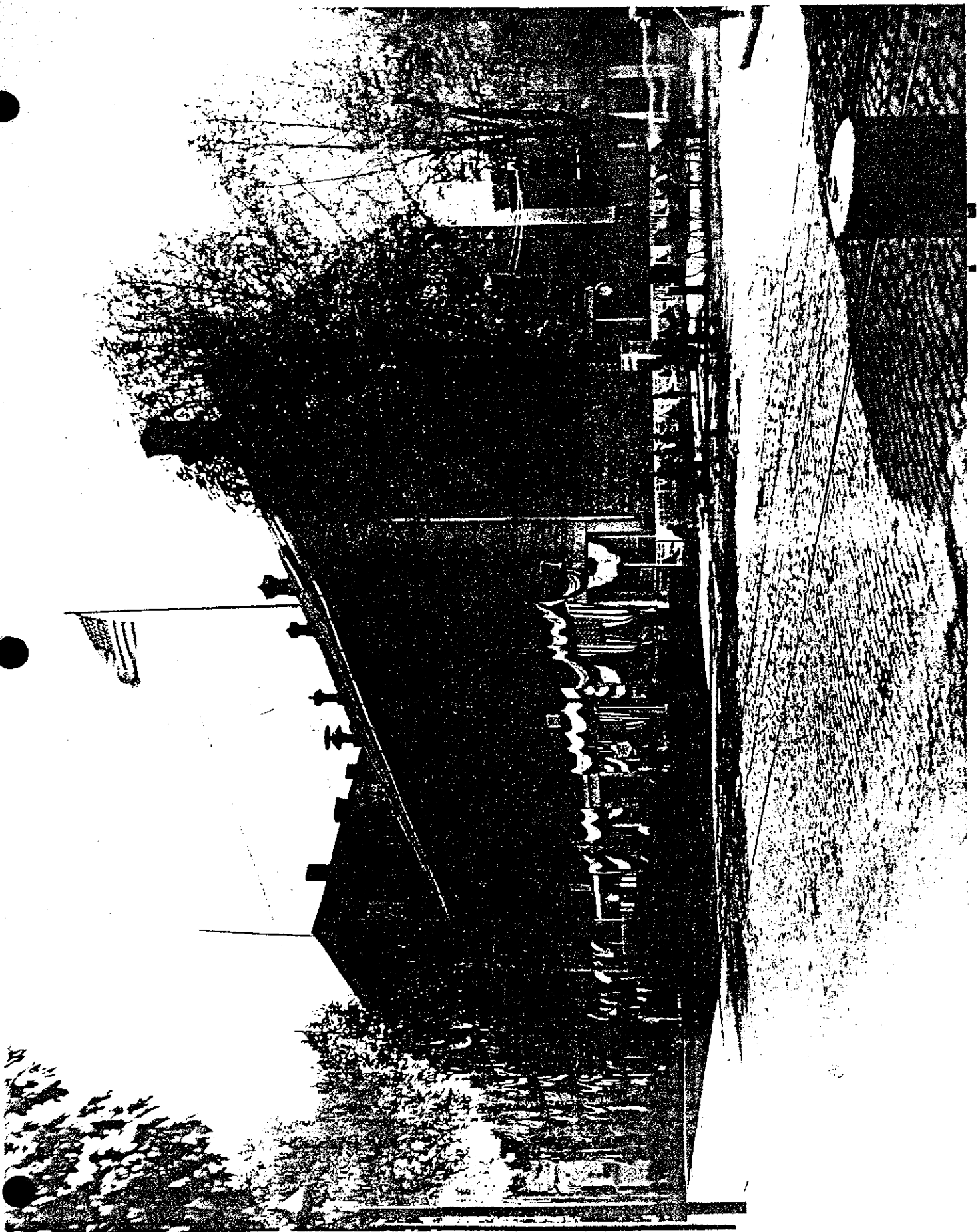
City Hall, 1979 (Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott)



MEMORIAL HALL



J.F.K. Civic Center, 1979 (Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott)



Old City Hall, ca. 1875 (University of Lowell)

ADDENDUM TO
LOWELL CITY HALL
407 Merrimack Street
Lowell
Middlesex County
Massachusetts

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XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

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